

Congress Listens to the Voice of the Unheard

2006 Congressional Foster Youth Internship



Senator Tim Johnson and his Foster Youth Intern at the Farewell Reception

"The CCAI helps match exceptional foster youth interns with a participating Congressional office. These are hard working young adults beating the odds by building positive futures for themselves and also paving the way for younger foster youth. I am a proud member of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, and it is an honor and pleasure to have my office participate in the program." – Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD)

"The FYI program gave our office the opportunity to work with an intern who has a unique perspective about child welfare issues. Her insight, experience, and vision underscored the need to make sure that our foster care system is reformed to ensure better outcomes for our foster youth." – Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA)

"I am consistently impressed by the quality, drive, and talent of our FYI interns. They work diligently for their cause and make a huge contribution to our office." – Whitney Rolig, Legislative Assistant, Office of Senator Larry Craig (R-ID)

"If given the chance, I would do it for the rest of my life!" – 2006 Foster Youth Intern

- Orientation, *Russell Senate Office Building*, June 1-3

Members of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's staff and Congressional staff members spent three days helping the interns prepare for their internship experience and living in Washington, D.C. National laws affecting youth in care, Congressional terminology, business etiquette, and proper



Foster Youth Interns complete an art activity.

attire were taught as sessions during this orientation.

- Retreat, *Danville, PA*, June 8-11

The annual retreat to rural Danville, PA was a tremendous success. Through team building activities and self reflection, the interns were able to unite as a group to share their life stories and new found ambitions. Various art projects, a local theme park, outdoor games, and a campfire made the trip a very well-rounded experience.

- Caring Connections Breakfast Briefing, *United States Capitol*, June 27

The *Family Dining Room* was filled to capacity with Members of Congress, Congressional staff members and the Foster Youth Interns. Senator Mary Landrieu, Representative Ginny Brown-Waite, Representative Danny Davis, Representative Adam Schiff, and Representative Curt Weldon sat alongside their Foster Youth Interns to learn about the importance of mentoring. Each Member of Congress stayed for the duration of the briefing enabling the youth to tell them about their experience in care.

- Farewell Reception, *United States Capitol*, July 11

Senator Larry Craig, Senator Tim Johnson, Senator Mary Landrieu, Representative Ginny Brown-Waite, Representative Carolyn McCarthy, and Representative Jim Oberstar came to meet and thank the interns for their service on Capitol Hill. These Members of Congress heard speeches from our young adults destined to change the face of the foster care system.



Senator Landrieu meets with the Foster Youth Interns at her home.

- Luncheon, *Senator Mary Landrieu's Home*, July 13

Senator Mary Landrieu opened her home to the Foster Youth Internship class along with their Congressional staff members. Lyssa Trujillo, a Foster Youth Intern, was given the chance to address the group and her words touched the audience tremendously. "God does not make trash," said Senator Mary Landrieu after Trujillo's speech, "and I am going to take the stories that each and every one of you have shared to my colleagues to make sure that children have a voice in Congress."

- Life long relationships

Beyond the time spent working in Congressional offices, the Foster Youth Interns had a chance to spend time together as fellow college students and alums of the foster care system. An unspoken bond among this group of exceptional people was formed and will last a lifetime.



Orientation in the Senate Veteran Relations Committee Room



Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite speaks at the Farewell Reception.



Foster Youth Interns spending time by the U.S. Capitol Building.

Kerry Adds New Energy to Legislative Team Sharde Armstrong Spends Summer on Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON D.C. - August 1, 2006 - Senator Kerry is pleased to welcome Upland resident Sharde Armstrong as a legislative intern on Capitol Hill. A rising junior at Taylor University, she is majoring in psychology and is also pre-law. Armstrong was placed in Senator Kerry's office by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

"Sharde is truly an inspiration to us all," Kerry said. "This is a young woman who was raised by the fostering community, and she has every right to wash her hands of that experience and move on. It takes a special sort of grace, conviction and leadership to live through the system, turn around, and try to change it. I am honored to have Sharde with us."

Armstrong sees her summer as a way to get a well rounded view of the foster care system that she is very passionate about. "I wanted a taste of what the foster care system looked like from inside of Congress," she said. "I wanted to know what was being done, that wasn't, and what needed to be fixed."

A typical day for Armstrong includes sorting mail, researching various issues, and writing briefs for the Senator's Legislative Assistants.



Representative Adam Schiff Introduces Fostering Our Future Act H.R. 5436

WASHINGTON D.C. - July 7, 2006 - My name is Rebecca Leach, and I am a congressional intern in Adam Schiff's office and a former foster youth. Congressman Schiff and I have been working on legislation, the Fostering Our Future Act (H.R. 5436), to improve the family court system and provide more qualified attorneys to represent foster youth. We are looking for organizations such as yours to endorse this legislation and expand our opportunities to move this bill before the end of this congressional session. Below is a fact sheet with additional information on the legislation. If you are interested in endorsing this bill please contact Tim Hysom in Rep. Adam Schiff's office at 202-225-4176 or Tim.Hysom@mail.house.gov. If your organization doesn't endorse legislation, I would appreciate it if you could let Tim or myself know other organizations that you think may be interested in getting involved or passing this email along to them.

The "Fostering Our Future Act of 2005" embodies many of the court improvement recommendations from the Pew Commission Report on Foster Care. One portion of the Pew Commission Report recommendations regarding court improvement grants to state courts for case load tracking and personnel training was incorporated into the Deficit Reduction Act that was signed into law earlier this year. The Fostering Our Future Act has three parts:

First, it provides loan forgiveness to full-time dependency attorneys who agree to remain in their jobs for at least three years. Awards, made on a first-come first-served basis and subject to the availability of funds, cannot exceed \$6,000/year or \$50,000 for any borrower. \$20 million is authorized for this appropriation for FY06 and such sums as necessary for the next five years.

Second, it requires a GAO study to compare States on

- The legal representation provided for children,
- Children's participation in their own cases,
- Preparation of dependency court judges,
- Case tracking and performance measurement, and
- Statewide collaborative foster care councils
- Third, it expresses four senses of Congress:
 - That State judicial leadership should use performance data to ensure accountability and allocate resources wisely,
 - That State courts should enable children and parents to participate in their own proceedings,
 - That law schools, bar associations, and law firms should help build the pool of qualified dependency attorneys, and



- That attorneys for children should have adequate training, reasonable caseloads, and receive adequate and reasonable compensation